

SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN

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May 22, 1973

Dear Professor Lederberg:

Sorry to be so slow about giving you some news of your "letter to the editor." Life around here, like life everywhere else, is overfull.

My colleagues and I have discussed the letter at length, and we have come to the following conclusions. First, notwithstanding the matters of principle I brought up in my letter of April 25, we think that many readers of Scientific American would be interested in your comments on the Stent article. Second, we feel that the actual discourse of your letter is somewhat cryptic. As it stands, the letter sounds as though it were addressed to molecular biologists rather than to the general reader. Such a reader would not be able to follow your argument without knowing considerably more about the events you describe and their background.

This second conclusion of ours suggests that the letter should be considerably longer, which I am afraid is out of the question. You have proposed that we run the letter as an article, but I am afraid that that is out of the question too. This may be, as you say, a cop-out on our part, but we do feel that the place for amplification and debate is not our regular article space but the letters column.

What to do? It seems to me that there are two alternatives. The first is that you could write another letter at a more "popular" level. That letter would need to be no longer than the one you have already given us, and it really should be shorter. The only solution there would be to omit some of the material in your original letter and concentrate on a central theme that you could enlarge.

The second alternative would be that you write a straightforward historical article about that period in the origins of molecular biology. Such an article, we would hope,

Professor Joshua Lederberg - 2 -

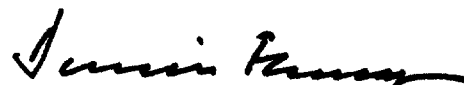
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would not be written as a reply to Stent. It seems to us that the discussion would be clearer if it were not polemical. If you are inclined to write such an article, it could be about 5,000 words long, which is nearly three times the length of your letter.

I do hope that one (or even both) of these alternatives will appeal to you. I am quite concerned that over the years we have consistently failed to present certain things you wanted to say. At times it must almost seem that we have it in for you. Of course we don't. On the contrary, not only are we aware of the breadth of your scientific contribution but also we admire your efforts over the years to explain scientific and technological matters to a larger public. The fact that we have not published anything by you so far is, I think, a kind of fluke.

You asked if we had received any other letters bearing on the history of molecular biology from 1940 to 1946. I am afraid the Carlson letter was the only one. We received a great many other letters, but most of them were from people who were outraged that scientific creation and artistic creation had been mentioned in the same breath. This is not, of course, the aspect of the Stent article that interests you most.

Cordially,



Dennis Flanagan
Editor

DF:ap

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** and I will think about this too.*

Have you seen Futon's book "Molecules and Life".